

# *A Lady of the Rose Scroll for Countess Lethrenn Bikkisdottir* *by Serena da Riva*

## *The Materials*

*Paper:* Opaline

*Pens:* Tape calligraphy nib and fine point metal crow-quill nib

*Ink:* Black Sumi Ink by Yasutomo

*Gesso:* Acrylic Gesso Sottile from The Gabriel Guild (SCA Illuminators Guild)

*Gold Leaf:* 24 karat Fine Gold from Monarch

*Burnisher:* Wooden Handled Agate dogs tooth

*Gouache:* Pebeo Extra Fine Designer Acrylic

## *The Source Material*

The Winchester Bible, Winchester, England. 1160 – 1175

## *Contents:*

*The Commission:* why I chose the source material.

*The Layout:* how I decided to layout the scroll and why.

*The Modifications:* how I changed the original image and why.

*The Calligraphy:* where I found the ductus for the calligraphy.

*The Gilding:* how the gilding was accomplished.

*The Painting:* how the painting was accomplished.

**A brief note:** This is my first original scroll. It was also the first time I ever worked on Opaline, the first time I attempted this calligraphic hand and the first time I attempted Gold Leaf gilding. I am ever grateful to Countess Lethrenn for having faith in me.

## The Commission

Upon ascending the Meridian Throne Countess Lethrenn Bikkisdottir assumed many duties; among those duties was the commissioning of her own Lady of the Rose scroll. I was most honored to be the individual chosen to undertake this task. She shared with me that the County scrolls that they (she and her lord the King) had also commissioned were to be in the style of the *Codex Manasse*. I did not want to create a scroll that was from the same text, but I wanted the styles to be complementary. The *Codex Manasse* was produced in Zurich, Germany beginning in 1310 and continuing until 1360. The text of the *Codex* is a series of courtly lyric poetry and the illuminations are portraits of the authors of each poem. The portraits are stylized providing the authors coat of arms and depicting him in any number of entertaining fashions, from fighting on horseback to reclining in his lover's arms (6).

After looking through countless images of illuminated manuscripts I chose to pull an image out of *The Winchester Bible*. *The Winchester Bible* was produced in Winchester, England beginning in 1160 and continuing until 1175 (6). This puts it considerably earlier than the *Codex*, but I felt that visually the two illumination styles were very complementary. I found a source on the internet that had several images from the manuscript and I selected one of the large, elaborately illuminated initial capitals that I felt could be modified to be appropriate to a Lady of the Rose scroll.

## The Layout

The initial I selected is actually a large 'V' (2) but I felt it looked more like an 'A'. The Meridies Scribes Handbook provides four alternate wordings for the Lady of the Rose scroll and none of these wordings has a word that begins with the letter 'V' in the first few sentences, so I chose to use it as an 'A'. In the original manuscript the text is written in two columns and the initial I selected is located partway down the right hand column of the page (2). Many scrolls in the SCA have a large illuminated capital as the opening word of the text; I wanted to avoid this appearance. But it is also necessary for their Majesties to affix their signatures and seals to the bottom of the scroll. This argues against the placing of the initial in the right hand column because it would cause the scroll to be unbalanced with all of the visual weight on the right hand side. So, I chose to place the initial on the left hand side but halfway through a sentence so that it was not the opening letter. This also allowed me to use the large painted calligraphy that was above the initial in the original.

According to the information provided on the website the original folio measures 583 x 396 mm which is roughly 22.95 x 15.59 inches (4). I sized the scroll taking this into consideration but I also had to consider the limitations of my materials. I determined the proper height of the calligraphy based on the best sized calligraphy nib that I had and the readability of the scroll once it was displayed on the wall. I believe this to be slightly larger than the one used in the original manuscript. I then sized the initial in relationship to the text. I believe this resulted in an initial larger than the original but by no means larger than some of the other initials. One in particular, a large 'P' that opens the first line of the top left hand column has the bowl of the 'P' the width of the column and the descender reaches to the bottom of the column (4). Because of this I feel that the size is faithful to the spirit of the manuscript even though it is not an exact replica.

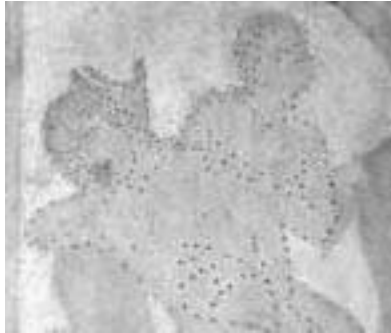
## The Modifications

After determining the layout of the scroll I went on to modify the original to better fit the purpose of the scroll. The original is Jeremiah receiving his calling from the hand of God (2). He is depicted among trees with strange flowers; I removed these flowers and replaced them with roses. I then removed the God figure and clouds and filled that space with an additional tree of roses. Lastly, I removed the scroll from Jeremiah's hand and then replaced his head with the head of a veiled woman.

Except for the aforementioned alterations the image was transferred onto the scroll by means of a light box. While the equipment used was decidedly modern, the technique of tracing is period. Cennini in his *Craftsman's Handbook* provides instructions for making tracing paper and suggests that you trace

“...from paper, panel or wall, which you want to take right off, put this tracing paper over the figure or drawing ...” (5).

The medieval scribe did not have the advantage of a light box, but Cennini also provides a technique for transferring the image onto the final page. This technique is called pouncing and it involves pricking fine holes along the lines that you need to copy and then positioning the parchment over your page. You then take a bag of charcoal or pumice and bounce it against your pattern and the pigment transfers the dots to the page where you can then connect the dots. There is evidence of this technique being used in illumination in the *Aberdeen Bestiary*. Several of the images in the manuscript have the tell tale holes around the original painting where they pricked through the original and into a second sheet which they then used for a pattern (1).



The view from the back on The Creation of Eve, Aberdeen Bestiary (1)

### **The Calligraphy**

To determine the correct calligraphic hand I consulted Marc Drogin’s book on medieval calligraphy. By looking at the original hand and comparing it to the exemplars and dates that Drogin supplies I decided that *The Winchester Bible* was written in Early Gothic. In Drogin’s book the author provides facsimiles of several manuscripts from each era and it is these facsimiles that he uses for the basis of his ductus. One of the examples that he sites for the Early Gothic hand is a manuscript in the Bodelian Library that was written at Winchester circa 1150 – 1200 (2). This confirmed my conclusion that Early Gothic was the correct hand for this project and I utilized Drogin’s ductus, modifying slightly based on the hand in the Winchester Bible.

### **The Gilding**

After completing the inking of the images with a crow-quill pen and the calligraphy the next step was gilding. For this I turned again to Cennini who instructs you on how to make up gesso and apply it to your parchment. You then let it dry and then “...you may lay it either with breathing or without breathing.” And the final step is burnishing (5). Here again I used some modern methods. For ease of application I used a ready made acrylic gesso and to concentrate the humidity of my breath I used a straw. I used an agate burnisher lightly after initial gilding and then several times thereafter at various stages of completion.

### **The Painting**

The final painting was accomplished using acrylic gouache, mixing paint to achieve color as close as I could approximate. The first step was to lay down the solid background colors in each area, each one being the mid-tone of the respective color. After all of the image was painted in solid I went back and shaded with a darker and lighter version of each color, proceeding one color at a time. I then went back with pure white to pick out highlights where I felt they were needed. The final step was to come back with the crow-quill pen and ink back in all of the black lines and draw features in the areas of the figures face, hands, feet and the features of the grotesques.

## Bibliography:

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